

Oxfam 2016 – Nick ‘Fitter’ Turner



Forming a team

Courts and I have been running together for six years and often discussed the idea of doing Oxfam one day. Joining the Milers in 2014 provided the perfect training ground and access to other people equally stupid to want to run such a distance. On an Eaglemont long run, I floated the idea with HoJu and while he didn't seem keen, he didn't say 'No'. Fast forward a couple of months and HoJu sent me a message that he was looking to get a team together. This was around the same time that Courts and I were scouting potential runners. HoJu mentioned that Duff was keen and so there we had the makings of our Oxfam 2016 team. Excitement was high and we were talking about all sorts of training runs. We registered the team as Melbourne Midday Milers, with the intention of changing the name to "MMM – betas" if a team of Alpha MMM decided to form a team.

We all recorded Marathon PBs (or equal PBs) in October. I was very happy to get an 11 minute pb with a time of 2:49:10, with Duff and HuJo nearly running me down in the final km. Also, we all ran the 56km Two bays in January. I was pretty happy with this run, beating my previous time by around 40 minutes and feeling really strong at the end. Courts and Duff also had great runs and together with 700, we won the men's team event. HoJu looked a bit sore and said that he was in struggletown for a good portion of the final 15km. With the thought of having to be able to run another marathon on top of that was enough to lead him to consider pulling out of Oxfam. We knew this would have been a tough decision, so we didn't try to influence him and let him make up his own mind. There are much bigger and better things to do in life than destroy your body while running stupid distances. We knew that finding a replacement wouldn't be difficult and we were only too happy to welcome Bermuda into the line-up. Bermuda had been in exceptional form having recorded pbs in every distance from 5km to marathon over the preceding 6 months. While his directional skills have been questioned, having three other people also responsible for navigation would hopefully mitigate this weakness (although one of them took a wrong turn running around Albert Park Lake once).

The build up

Duff, Bermuda and I were in the middle of a big training block leading up to marathons at the end of February. While we didn't do any specific Oxfam training, my assumption was that marathon training in the Bevo stables wasn't a bad substitute. I hoped to get out on course together so that we could see a couple of stages, but that never eventuated. I did do a solo stage 1 recon over the Easter weekend. While it wasn't difficult to navigate, there were quite a few turns that weren't obvious and I was constantly referring to the maps. I was a bit concerned about not having run the other stages, but Duff assured us that the course would be well marked on the day. The longest runs I completed in the build-up were a 43km run in December and the 56km Two Bays event in January as well as doing 30+km run most weekends. Have completed these distances with relatively little trouble, gave me some degree of confidence for tackling 100kms. I was consistently doing 90+km weeks for a few months, before getting a calf complaint in the taper period before the Wangaratta marathon. I pulled out of the marathon, not wanting to risk Oxfam 5 weeks later. I might have lost a bit of form over the next few weeks but a 59:20 16km Run 4 the Kids gave me a bit of confidence that I was still in reasonable shape.

We had a couple of pre-race lunch meeting to sort all the logistics. We discussed all our preferences for the nutritional requirements. We were generally on the same page in that we knew what worked for us in previous marathons and we were planning on having that plus a lot of other options. There was, however, some contrast in our approaches ranging from taking a very thorough scientific approach with specific carb measurements to a very relaxed attitude of 'Just eat when you're hungry'. Although on the day, we were generally similar with our thoughts that we should have lots of different options available depending on what we felt like at the time. I'd never run more than 56kms before so I didn't know what I would feel like, so an over-supply of options seemed like a good approach.

HoJu, JC, Jessie and Kirsty (Mrs Fitter) had kindly offered to be our support crew. Jessie had done Oxfam several years earlier and provided much needed advice about the logistics of the day. JC had all our own custom made pizzas orders sorted, Kirsty did a lot of reading of fb posts about what other teams were doing and made me feel thoroughly inadequately prepared - Gave me the kick in the butt that I needed.

Fundraising

I was overwhelmed with generosity that people gave to our Oxfam team. I was pretty concerned with this aspect of the event in the months leading up to the run. The first big wave of donations came in after Duff put up a post on the Milers facebook page and donations continued to flow in after I annoyed friends and family. HoJu did a fantastic job of organising a couple of fundraising functions at his work, while many colleagues at WorkSafe were also very generous. The total fundraising amount exceeded my expectations and I was now much more relaxed about the run. If people can be so generous for such a worthy cause, all I have to do is something I love doing and also do it with the company of friends for a day. The donations continued to flow in after the run, including a huge anonymous donation of \$250 to bring us to over \$3000.

Race day



The night before, I stayed at the in-laws house which was a 5 minute drive to the start line. I ended up getting a good 7 hours sleep before getting up at about 5am. Bermuda stayed at Duff's house and drove in together with Jessie. Not sure how much sleep Bermuda got after sleeping in the same room as all of Duff's Lego, but talking about the Lego DeathStar occupied many kilometres for

the remainder of the day (and weeks to follow). JC gave Courts a lift to the start line and we all met about 5:30 at Jells park to go over the final logistics of the day. As expected the weather conditions were perfect and they remained that way for the entire day.

Filing into the starting area and making our way up to the front was pretty easy. We had a quick chat with Dozer and AL from team "Mr and Mrs Miler". Dozer was in his element and was looking super excited. He asked about whether we were also meeting our support crew at the Golf Course. I had no idea what he was talking about and it was too late to do anything about it now.



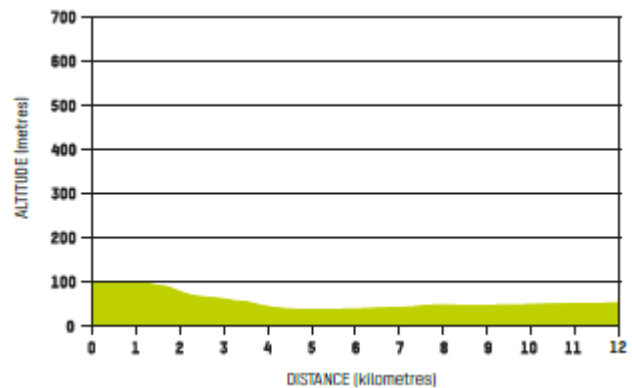
"Dozer mentioned something about a mini-CP?..."



"Doesn't matter, we'll be right"

Stage 1 – Jells Park to Churchill National Park

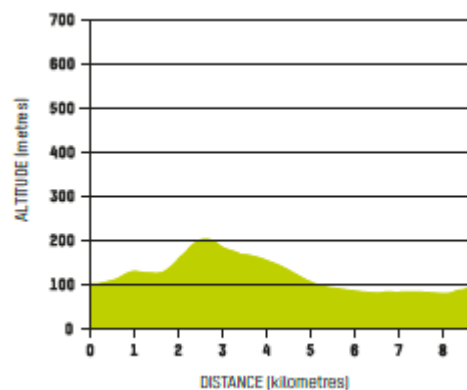
Stage 1 was very cruisey, chatting with “Foleys’ List” (another team targeting sub 12 hours). They seemed to be a very experienced team, having done many crazy ultras around the world and having one guy who had done every Melbourne Oxfam. Obama rolled by on his bike and was keen for a chat. He seemed to be enjoying not running it this year.



Signing off at the first checkpoint was relatively pain free. I took the opportunity to empty my pockets of empty gel packets. As the checkpoint was in a slightly different position to previous years, we asked which way to get back on the track. Someone pointed us down the hill, so off we trotted. It didn't take long to figure out that it didn't seem like the right direction, so we asked again and were advised that we should run up the hill. Oh well, lost one minute. I remember saying if that is the worst thing that happens all day, we would have done well. How right I was...

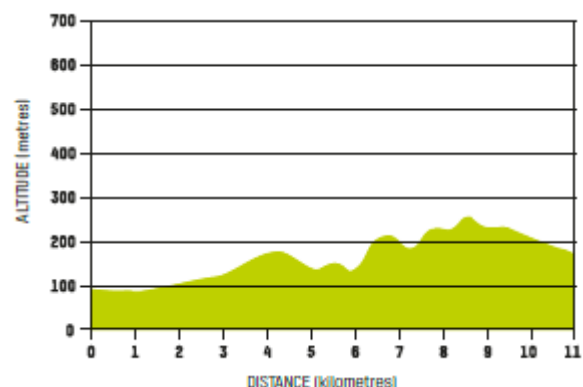
Stage 2 - Churchill National Park to Lysterfield Lake

Stage 2 was pretty easy. We came across the first of the steep hills and gave us an indication of what was to come later in the day. It was good to see Obama working harder than us for once as he was peddling like mad, while we took some easy strides up the steep hills while getting in a bit more food. Smurf joined us for a trot and it was good to hear about his Oxfam tales of years past. We strolled into CP2. It was a little chaotic with the first top up of supplies, but our crew was doing a great job with having all our stuff laid out.



Stage 3 - Lysterfield Lake – Ferntree Gully Picnic Ground

Again, after a little unpreparedness with directions we asked which way to set off for stage 3. Smurf took charge and told us where to go (in a nice way). We trotted off on a very uneventful first half of the stage. For most of this section we were out-numbered by kangaroos 10 to 1 (I thought there were a lot of kangaroos at Westerfolds Park). When we got to the first major intersection, Smurf turned around and wished us luck for the rest of the run, while Obama continued to cycle with us until we came across an unexpected turn and big hill. The Oxfam arrow marker clearly pointed to a sharp right straight up the hill. The sight of that hill and not having enough gears on his bike was enough for ‘Cheddar’ to bid us farewell and turn around. Off we drudged up the hill as equally steep as any other hill we would see for the day. About 500m up the

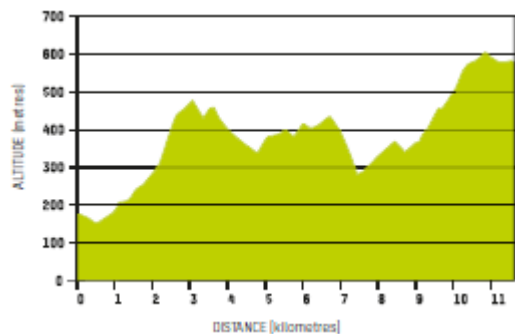


hill, we were nervously chatting about this not seeming the right way. We hadn't seen any course markers for a while. Courts jogged up ahead to see if there were any course markers ahead, while I got the maps out of my pocket to see if I could locate where we were. There were a couple of hiking tracks diverting off the main course and we worked out that we had taken one of them. Back down hill we jogged and got to the bottom just as 'Foley's List' had turned to jog up the hill. We inspected the arrow and realised that somebody has put it out facing the wrong way. We muttered a few expletives as we turned it around to face the correct direction and cursed the fact that we had just lost our 7 minute lead over Foley's List. We jogged with them for a couple of kms until we gradually built a small lead again.

We met our attentive support crew at the bottom of 1,000 steps for a replenishment of supplies before starting the hilliest stage of the day. We spent about ten minutes at this checkpoint, which was probably a bit too long as we could have used the next few kms of walking the hills as an opportunity to get some food in. Foley's list seemed to be much more experienced than us and had a very quick checkpoint before we started Stage 4 together.

Stage 4 - Ferntree Gully Picnic Ground to Olinda

This was one of the more interesting stages. The first couple of kms involved lots of walking as we headed up the Lyrebird track, next to the 1,000 steps. I took this opportunity to get in a couple more dry weet-bix washed down with a little Gatorade much to the amusement of Bermuda who thought my dietary preferences were a little odd. We started running when the hill flattened off at the top and edged our way ahead of Foley's List (again). We jogged our way through some awesome country side and I realised that I should take the opportunity for some weekend long training runs around here sometime in the near future.



We crossed over the Mountain Highway and asked the course marshals which of the 2 tracks we should take. They said they didn't know, which we thought was kind of odd for course marshals, but I guess their primary responsibility was for peoples safety while crossing the highway. Getting lost on the previous stage must have spooked us a bit too much as we second-guessed ourselves and went the wrong way. When we found ourselves back on the right course, we were clearly a good distance behind Foleys List. We discussed the idea of just running with them for the next couple of stages to ensure that we didn't get lost. It seemed like a good idea, but we found that our easy jogging pace seemed to be a little bit quicker than theirs and we found ourselves in front again.

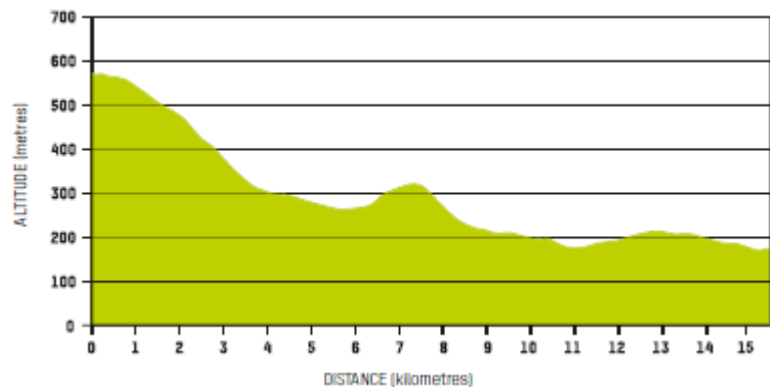
CP4 was probably our most efficient. We had done a couple by now and we knew the drill and also the fatigue wasn't a factor this early in the day. JC and HoJu met us and quickly gave us the quick summary of where the officials were to sign in, where the toilets were and where all our stuff was laid out for us.

Stage 5 - Olinda to Mount Evelyn

Stage 5 continued on in the beautiful Dandenongs. The first half of this stage was among the best running trails I have ever done. The single file path snaked its way through some thick forest amongst some very old trees, some of which had fallen over

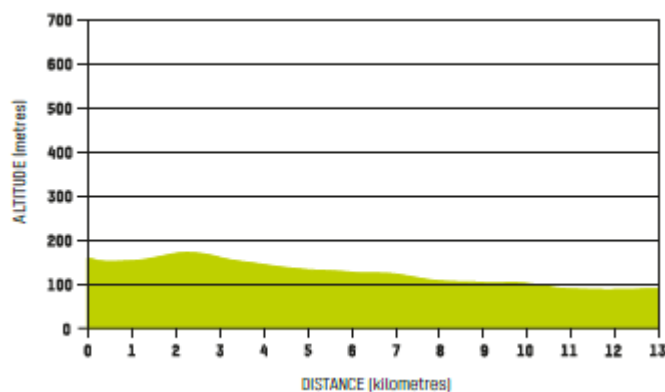
the path. Bermuda must have been enjoying the serenity a bit too much as he took a massive tumble down one of the hills. It looked pretty spectacular as gels and chocolate coffee beans flew from his pocket. Luckily it did seem too serious and despite a nasty graze on his thigh (which would later turn into a nasty bruise), there was nothing broken.

This was one of the longest stages over the course of the day and the pace dropped off a little as we entered CP5. This was the CP was when I noticed that I really needed to take the opportunity to sit down and have a brief but proper rest. While the spirits were good, the body was starting to feel a bit sore. Knowing that we had done 60kms and still had a marathon to run swirled in the back of my mind. It was good to see another familiar face at this CP as GG was on official volunteering duties. He expertly cleaned up after us, after Courts and I demonstrated our inability to pass a bottle of coke to each other. We had about 15 minutes at this CP and just as we were preparing to leave, Foley's List wandered in and sat down to a big meal of chips and potato cakes. While it might have been a good thing to do for the long game, the thought of consuming that sort of heavy food was not sitting well with me.



Stage 6 - Mount Evelyn to Worri Yallock Primary School

Stage 6 and 7 were the stages that I found most difficult. We had already done about 60kms (should have been 57kms) and we were now starting the Warburton Trail section – long, flat and boring. Unlike other stages, there was no opportunity for rest while walking up a steep hill. After previous ultras, I knew that after running 50+kms, speed was going to decrease and I expected to be doing around 6:30 per km. The ease of the terrain along this trail made it possible to jog under 6 min kms, however, I was the slowest in this section staying at the back. Bermuda



and Courts seemed to be cruising along and would occasionally wait to jog with me to pep me up a bit. I could tell Duff was struggling, but he had his 'game face' on and he just powered through without any walking breaks maintaining a steady pace, in front of me. I had a couple of walking breaks, just to make sure that I continued having something to eat and drink, knowing that we still have 3-4 hours of running ahead of us. While the body was feeling pretty tired, there were no major issues. The only negative I experienced was some very mild cramping in the right calf near the start of this stage.

We found our way to CP6, where our expert support crew had everything ready to go. JC jogged in with us, making sure that we didn't miss the turn off after we had earlier seen a couple of scum bags riding around on their pushbikes with a collection of course markers.

HoJu offered us an electrolyte tablet, which I quickly accepted after the moment of cramping during the last stage. Not sure if it was 'HoJu's magic pills' or not, but I never experienced any more cramping for the rest of the run.

The black coffee that Kirsty had ready for me was going down way too well. I only had a little bit, being a bit nervous that a shot of caffeine might do weird things when it kicks in halfway through the next stage, particularly when I saw Duff have a pretty good little spew.



"Nice spew mate"

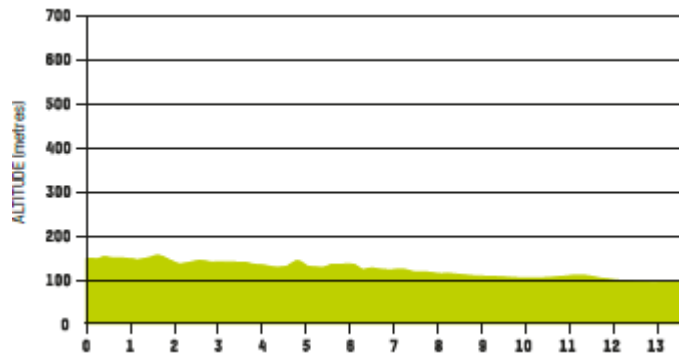


Courts - "Where am I?/Who are you?/What am I doing?"

As we jogged across the oval to get back on the Warburton Trail, Foley's List were jogging the other way into the checkpoint. After our slightly longer than planned CP, it seemed like they were gaining on us. There were a few nervous glances over my shoulder over the next couple of hours, but it turned out that was the last time, we saw Foley's List until after the finish.

Stage 7 - Worri Yallock Primary School to Millwarra Primary School

Stage 7 was much the same as stage 6. The Warby Trail was long and open and the four of us spread out a little bit while remaining in visual contact. I was again trailing the group and Courts waited for me to catch up a couple of times to check on me and making sure that I was still

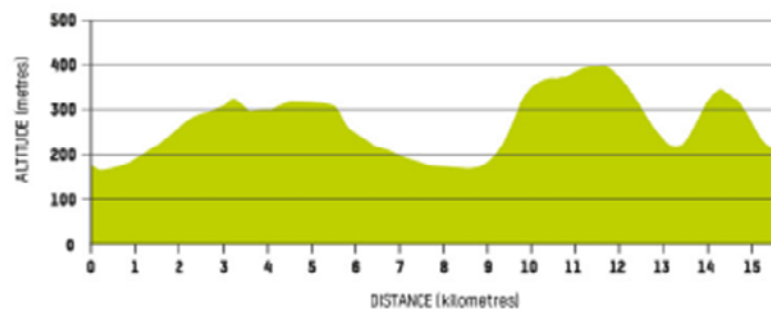


getting in the fluids and some food. Towards the end, I saw a couple of people in miler shirts in the distance. I was glad to be getting near the end of this section and get stuck into the hills of the final stage. As the miler t-shirts became less blurry, I realised it wasn't the checkpoint and that Kirsty and Jessie had pulled up beside the road to give encouragement. I tried to convince Kirsty to run with me for the last couple of kms of this stage, but she wasn't interested. She often says that I run too fast for her, I thought it was a good opportunity for her to reverse that.

Near the end and we were preparing to turn left to the final CP. A lady sitting out the front of the cafe told each of us to keep going straight and that the CP is just up a bit further. After following her advice for a couple of minutes, I looked up and saw Duff and Bermuda standing ahead of me looking a bit bemused. We realised that the directions we were given were completely wrong and so we turned around and head back past the 'helpful' lady. I think we refrained from saying anything, but the look on her face indicated that she realised her earlier directions may not have been the best advice.

Stage 8 - Millwarra Primary School to Wesburn Park

I really enjoyed the last stage. It was getting easier to count down the remaining kms and plenty of hills meant that we were walking together having a good chat



for several kms. There were also some big steep downhills that allowed me to put in some big strides and achieve a reasonable pace. The support crew met us just near the golf course, which was last year's final CP. This was the mini-CP that Dozer was talking about on the start line. We should have known that our support crew would be all over this. They gave us our headlamps and torches and off we set for the final 7-8kms.

The final section was pretty tough terrain with very steep uphill and downhill sections, jagged rocks and potholes all over the place. I was feeling pretty good on the downhills and was able to roll into a decent pace.

The last daylight was starting to disappear so we switched on our headlamps so that we could see the very rough terrain around us. We were nearly at the top of the final hill when I experienced a few moments of what seemed like very low blood sugar level. I suddenly started feeling really weak and started shaking a little bit. Luckily I had a few lollies left and quickly gobbled them down and nearly instantly I felt better. We made it to the top of the hill and could see the

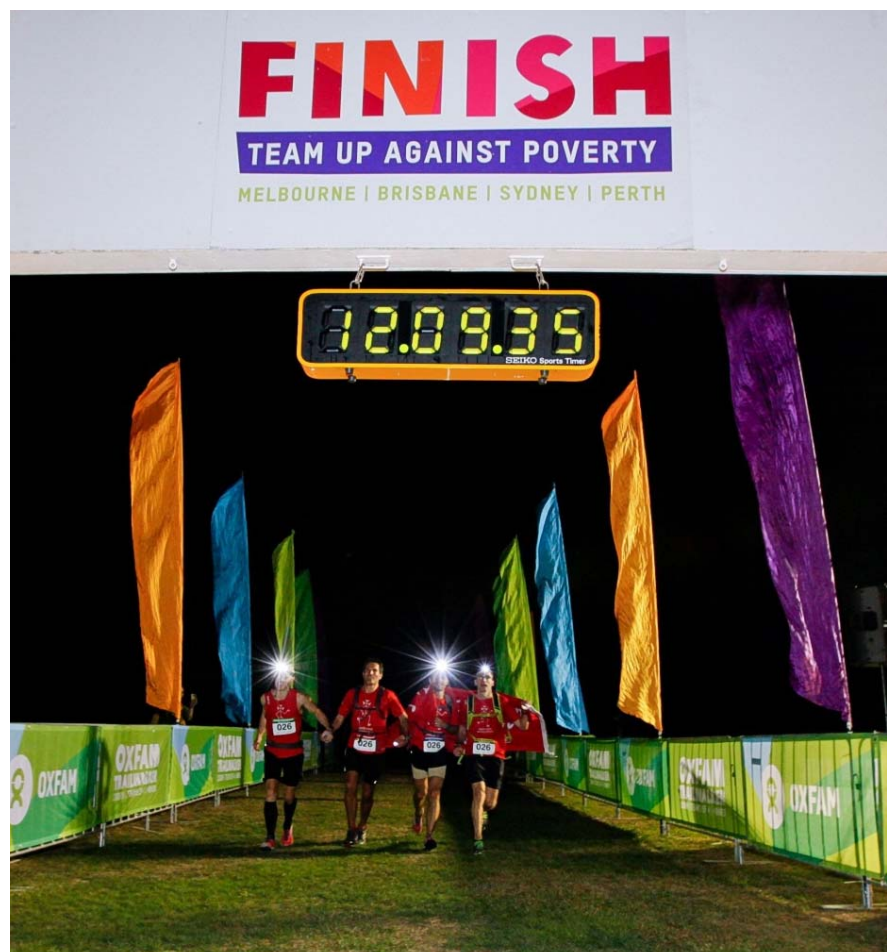


The first glimpse of our headlamps coming down the final hill

floodlights of the finish-line down on the oval in the distance. We found out later that Smurf, Smoothie and GGO, jogged towards us to meet us and encourage us into the finish line, but unfortunately the stage had taken a little longer than we had hoped, so we just missed them as they had to jog off to meet the Mr and Mrs Miler team at an earlier checkpoint.

We had realised that we were not going to go sub 12 hours, but concluded that we still had an awesome experience and were probably going to take line honours (I was repeatedly looking over my shoulder just to make sure).

The last ten minutes or so, we were basically running in pitch black with only our headlamps to guide us. We found the final turn and ran along a windy bush track for the final km or so. The unfamiliar nutritional requirements of the day were having an effect on me in that I was sending out involuntary audible beacons at regular intervals, revealing my location to teammates. This was probably least helpful for Duff, who was trailing me for this section. We emerged from this foresty section and ran across the clearing towards the bright lights of the finish-line. HoJu appeared out of the darkness, with some inspirational words and the miler's flag which we wrapped around us and entered the finishing straight.



The Finish

Entering the finishing straight was quite an experience. We had all gone through difficult patches at some point during the day and we now realised that we had accomplished this goal together. That



along with the cheers of everyone at the finishline and the knowledge of the real purpose of this event was enough for there to be an admission that there were a few eyes welling up.

After crossing the line, we quickly made our way to the officials to make sure we were all signed off and done. A couple of the organisers gave us a

couple of bottles of champagne and asked to do a few photos. We had a few shots back at the finishline, before being moved over to the dais and having our 'F1' moment of spraying champagne. This is, of course, the reason that we decided to finish later than 12 hours, just to make sure that we had a good contrasting black background for the photo opportunity. We were then joined by a journalist up on the dais who interviewed us for the Oxfam blog.



Champagne and sweat soaked interview



We then moved on to our second round of media commitments (It's hard being famous). The interviewer was asking all sorts of questions about the day and our club (Duff tried to recruit her to the milers). She finished with a question to each of us asking to sum up the experience in one word. My present cognitive state didn't allow me to fully grasp the simplicity of the questions and I crapped on for a minute or two

before concluding with my lame one-word answer (which I can't recall).

We then took the opportunity to put on some warmer clothes and relax with our support crew and get stuck into JC's pizza. They went down very well as did the slightly warm beer. After sitting down for about 30 minutes, I found myself suddenly getting very cold very quickly. It was a



sign that I needed to rug up and get moving home. A few hugs and congratulations with the support crew and we were on our way home. While pretty exhausted from the day, I was still buzzing from the experience and lay in bed for a good four hours before dozing off.

The following day, I decided that I would definitely do it again if the opportunity arose. It may have been all the excitement of finishing that replaced all the memories of pain during the preceding 12 hours, but overall it was the positive experience that endured.

A few things I would do differently (to remind 'future me' of how we can potential improve if I ever do it again):

- A bit more course recon wouldn't go astray. I now have a 103km pb. But I would have preferred a better 100km pb. Running some of these stages as training runs would not only benefit the navigation on the day, but mostly running through the Dandenongs is just a beautiful place to run. The scenery is fantastic, the trails are interesting and the hills are challenging.
- Don't give the support crew as much food to cart around all day. It's good to have lots of options but to be more efficient at CP, it would be good to have a small box of the important stuff that we can use to replenish our supplies. We probably don't need to spend as much time at CP and could start walking the first five minutes of the next stage if we need to have a better rest. Sure if someone is having issues, have a rest and do what needs to be done, but if there are hills on the next stage, use that as an opportunity to have a good drink and get some food. CP3 is a good example of where we could have just restocked our pockets and backpacks with food to consume over the numerous walking opportunities up steep sections of stage 4.
- Turn on headlamps as soon as it slightly gets dark. It was quite a challenge to see some of the course markers in the daylight. As soon as we turned the headlamps on, the markers started glowing from a couple of hundred metres away.
- Start early – We were very lucky that the two teams that recorded faster times than us decided to take later starting times. If there is a remote chance of taking line honours, I would recommend starting early to give yourself every chance. We may not have won, but it certainly felt like we did when we crossed the line.

A few things I would do the same:

- Run with the same bunch of guys. Not sure where we will all be placed for future Oxfam campaigns, but if we ever find ourselves all wanting to do it again and also being at a similar level of fitness with a common goal, it would be great to do it again and try to better our time.
- Have an amazing support crew. Our support crew was fantastic, bringing lots of extra supplies to each checkpoint as well as carting around our own custom boxes of stuff. I'd love to return the favour one day in the future and be support crew for somebody else.

Nutrition on the day

8 gels
2 apples
7 weet-bix
500g lollies
Half a long black coffee
5 litres of Gatorade
0.5 litre of flat coke
2 litres of water
4 energy bars
BBQ shapes
Pretzels

Strava Data

<https://www.strava.com/activities/539667974>

Oxfam Blog

<https://trailwalker.oxfam.org.au/2016/04/first-across-the-finish-line/>

